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**NOAA FISHERIES RESUMES COLLECTION
OF RECREATIONAL FISHERY DATA IN CARIBBEAN**

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service is collecting important recreational fishery information from saltwater anglers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The new information will become part of the U.S. Marine Recreational Fishery database and will provide managers information they need to ensure quality marine angling in the U.S. Caribbean. The survey, also known as the MRFSS, has not been conducted in the U.S. Caribbean since 1981 due to funding constraints.

According to Maury Osborn, program manager for NOAA's Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Program, "The Caribbean data is like a missing puzzle piece. With this data, we will have a much more complete picture of recreational fisheries in the Southeastern U.S. and Gulf of Mexico."

The Caribbean survey will be conducted at 113 access sites in Puerto Rico and 143 sites in the U.S. Virgin Islands, including shore, boat ramp, marina and for-hire charter sites. The Puerto Rican-based survey will include 3,000 to 4,000 field interviews and 12,000 telephone interviews. The U.S. Virgin Islands survey will include 2,000 field interviews and 5,400 telephone interviews. ORC Macro, an international research company, has been contracted to conduct both the field and telephone surveys in the Caribbean.

In addition to providing basic catch and participation data, the survey serves as a platform to collect specialized information such as economic data. The recreational survey relies on the use of a field survey of anglers at fishing access sites to collect information about the catch such as numbers of fish, species, length and weight. A telephone survey of households collects information on fishing effort and participation including numbers of anglers, frequency of participation and location of fishing activity.

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These data are essential for more effective marine fisheries management in the U.S. They are used in biological stock assessments and also contribute to fishery management decisions by providing managers with a better understanding of the biological impact and social importance of marine angling.

“Recreational fishing is an important activity to many residents in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and we are excited by the prospect of once again including Caribbean data in the U.S. recreational fisheries database,” said Osborn.

The National Marine Fisheries Service is providing base level funding to support the recreational survey sampling in the Caribbean. The Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources is contributing resources to increase their sample size and is participating in field data collection.

“Successful re-initiation of the recreational survey in the Caribbean benefitted greatly from the cooperative planning effort with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and the Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife. Our partner agencies provided vital input on their recreational fisheries including identification of fishing access sites, the amount of fishing activity at each site and information on local conditions,” said Osborn.

For more information, call Maury Osborn, program manager for the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Program at the National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Science and Technology, 1315 East-West Highway, FS/T, Room 12450, Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301) 713-2328.

A complete listing of saltwater angling catch, effort, and participation data is available through the National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey Web page, <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st1/recreational>.